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ABSTRACT

Despite a wealth of research literature showing the importance of teacher empowerment and autonomy, and a multitude of plans and models for bringing teachers to the decision-making table, teachers remain encapsulated in their classrooms. In spite of career ladders, career lattices, merit pay, and mentorships, teachers have been unable to take their place as first-class citizens in the American education system. Current plans and models involving career ladders, staff development, collegial support, and problem-solving show some promise for improving this situation, but more time is needed to evaluate the total effects of such strategies. It is suggested that the study of people in organizations be conducted using new research methods and strategies to empower the research subjects. Exploring new ways to look at the nature of organizations and the people within them are needed. Programs should be devised that will provide teachers with the means to identify, define, and resolve their own issues and problems. (CB)

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EMPOWERING TEACHERS: A Search for Professional Autonomy

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Of the best leaders
     The people only know they exist;
The next best they love and praise;
     The next they fear;
And the next they revile.

When they do not command the people's faith
     Some will lose faith in them
And they may resort to recriminations.

But of the best, when their task is accomplished,
     Their work done,
The people will remark,
     "WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES!"

--Lao Tsuh--

INTRODUCTION

Schools in the 1980's are in a period of change; the student population is changing. Federal and state governments have legislated changes in an attempt to raise standards while providing equal access for all, often increasing demands for services while simultaneously cutting funds. The community the school serves is changing too. Giroux (1986) contends that we have lost the idea of democracy in our schools as well as in society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The traditional approach to school administration, stressing organizational hierarchy over individual involvement, encourages uncritical acceptance of the dominance of pre-existing structures. If people at the bottom of the pyramid subscribe to this organizational theory, they can relax. Let someone at the top do the decision-making, "take the heat". The people at the bottom need only to comply with the parts of the decision they see as necessary to safeguard or maintain their positions within the organization. The result is that the organization tends to remain static, or even lose momentum, as "slave" labor is rarely 100% compliant, but carries with it subtle forms of sabotaging the master. What is really needed to energize an organization is the expectation that innovation and change will occur. Along with this expectation for change, methods to implement it must be in existence. To innovate, an organization requires consensus, not compliance. How do you get consensus?

RATIONALE

Putting decision-making power as close to the point of delivery as possible makes implementation successful (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). Other research has borne out the same conclusion (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977).

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR STUDY

Traditionally, the study of school leadership and supervision has been one of forms, prescriptions and recipes for continuing the inherited paradigm. Much research has been done on the practicalities of the paradigm and very little on the intrinsic qualities. In the past, school organizations have been able to effect school reform through teacher turnover and recruitment. Schools could depend on injections of new ideas from "new hires", fresh from teacher-training institutions. Now, however, there is much less movement in personnel, and few new teachers are being hired. Mann (1976) believes we must use existing personnel. Mc Laughlin and Marsh (1978, p.69) in their discussion of issues related to staff development state:

> One reason for the new status of staff development is the recognition that many of the "Great Society " education reform efforts fell short primarily because planners seriously underestimated teacher-training needs. In retrospect, it was unrealistic to expect that classroom teachers could bring about significant change in the services provided to such special students groups as the disadvantaged and the bilingual without substantial in-service education...We have learned that the problem of reform or change is more a function of people and organizations than of technology.

Given these two realizations, it is imperative we further explore the relationship between people and organizations.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An Historical Perspective

From the one-room schoolhouse, where to retain their jobs, teachers were held captive to the interests of the community elders, public education in America has evolved into school districts servicing multiple interests, from corporations providing funding, to school boards representing a diversity of community interests. To protect teachers from arbitrary dismissal in this environment, the tenure system was devised. After satisfactorily completing a probationary period, the teacher is granted tenure, and from that point on can be dismissed only for reasons of immorality or incompetence. While this system does protect the teacher against willful dismissal, an unfortunate side effect has been to promote mediocrity. There is little incentive for change. The issue of empowerment through decision-making is not addressed.

In an effort to gain professional control, various teachers' associations were formed. Believing in strength in numbers, teachers joined these organizations. Unfortunately, these organizations, because of internal politics, disunity, dissension, and often lacking member support, have done little to change the power structure. Their main success has been as bargaining agents in contract negotiations. Other than complaining about the surplus of middle level administrative positions in certain districts, they have not seriously addressed the restructuring of school districts and the hierarchy of power.

During the past fifty years, national studies such as the Commonwealth Teacher Training Study, The American Council on Education's Commission on Teacher Education, The Ford Foundation grants to various colleges, The Holmes Group, the Carnegie Commission, among others, looked to improve American education (Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Fall 1986). Each reform effort followed, or was an integral part of, widespread dissatisfaction with schooling in general. All pointed to the pivotal role of the teacher in any attempt to make significant reforms, either in schooling or in society.

One attempt to address the problem of lowered incentive was merit pay for teachers, a concept which depended on incremental pay raises for teachers based on some type of formal evaluation by administrators, using criteria developed to judge specific teaching skills. This concept failed for lack of effective evaluation procedures (Johnson, 1984). A 1979 survey conducted by Education Research Service attributes the general failure of merit pay programs to inadequate teacher evaluation systems, opposition from teachers' associations and insufficient teacher support (Porwall, 1979).

Some Current Models

Once again, national attention is being given to the structure of American public schools. A 1984 project, sponsored by the California Round Table on Educational Opportunity, made the recommendation that teaching involve

both a career ladder and a career lattice. The career ladder must have at least four levels, each having its own certification. These four levels would include:

A. Interns--those in initial training programs

B. Apprentices----those in the first several years of teaching, still needing significant supervision

C. Career teachers--capable of independent action, working toward excellence and increased responsibility

D. Master teachers--superior teaching skills, accepts responsibilities, both to the school and to the profession

The career lattice would include other than classroom-based activities and school-level responsibilities such as community liaison, performance reviewer, media specialist, in-service trainer, peer evaluator, curriculum developer, program developer, grant writer, and so on.

Others have addressed the issue of career ladders (Wagner & Yee, 1985). All of the plans have incremental pay increases attached to incremental responsibility with hierarchical status.

One North Carolina school district has implemented a pilot career ladder program. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg program has three levels of advancement. Level One follows the probationary period. Level One teachers earn an additional $2,000. The teacher may evaluate curriculum materials and assist beginning teachers, in addition to a regular classroom assignment. Level Two teachers earn an additional $2,000 for extended in-service training duties. This may include transfer to a problem school, research, and

organizational "trouble-shooting." After five years at Level Two, teachers may apply for Level Three, which brings another $2,000. The job becomes one of curriculum development, teacher training or research rather than primary classroom duties.

Tennessee has a statewide career ladder program. It has five steps; two apprentice levels and three career level programs. Each step carries additional responsibilities tied to state-conducted performance evaluations and staff development. Teachers on the third step earn an additional $4000 for an extended work year, teaching summer school, working with student teachers or beginning teachers. Fifth step teachers earn an additional $7,000.

Two major difficulties have reduced the efficacy of career ladder programs; 1) they challenge the historically egalitarian status of teachers, and 2) they require an evaluation system, the same problem that haunted the merit pay plans.

Teacher mentorship programs are similar to career ladder programs in that they introduce a status difference into the profession. They differ from career ladders because mentorship is not directly linked to performance evaluation, nor does it create a formal hierarchy. California has been in the forefront of mentorship and has adopted a statewide program. District participation is permissive, not mandatory. Initial participation has been good, despite short time lines for implementation. Over 5,000 teachers have been given stipends of $4,000 a year for completing

assigned duties and responsibilities which may include assisting new and experienced teachers. They may also be assigned staff development or curriculum development responsibilities. The California mentor teacher serves one to three years, with priority being given to those teachers who have already successfully completed time in the position.

Since the plan's inception in 1983, problems have emerged (Wagner, 1985). Criteria for selection has been less than consistent statewide, with fierce competition in some districts, and in others the position has gone to anyone who has applied. Being tenured, having substantial recent classroom experience, and demonstrating exemplary teaching ability as indicated by effective communication skills, subject matter knowledge and knowledge of a range of teaching strategies are the only requirements for selection consistent throughout the state. The mentor teacher must remain in the classroom at least 60% of the school year. Some of the teachers chosen for the position have been excellent classroom teahers, but have not been able to work effectively with adults.

Another worrisome problem to potential applicants is the amount of extra work required. Originally designed to recognize superior teaching skill, the role has been ambiguously defined. In some school districts the mentor teacher is expected to work an extended time, often relinquishing the classroom to a substitute teacher, to the detriment of the teacher's own class. Unrealistic administrative expectations coupled with rushed time lines

have added to teachers' scepticism about role efficacy.

Finally, the great discrepancy in the work assigned has contributed to role ambiguity. When a teacher is successful in the classroom, it can be a difficult decision to give up that role, as some mentor teachers have been asked to do, for central district office responsibilities. A survey conducted by Far West Labs (Little, Galaragan & O'Neale, 1984) revealed that the five most commonly assigned mentor responsibilities were : (1) staff development or consultation with individual teachers on a request basis (53% of current mentors), (2) conducting or facilitating school-or district-level staff development (50%), (3) assisting teachers in locating and organizing curriculum materials (42%), (4) curriculum development in high priority areas (42%), and (5) classroom or other asxsistance to beginning teachers (41%) (Wagner, Nov.'85).

Karen Kent, author of a master teacher program in the Marin County Office of Education, proposes to clarify the role of mentor by ascribing to it five characteristics (Wagner & Yee, 1985). These are described below:

1) Resource Linker--develops curriculum materials, acts as agent to link teachers and instructional resources.

2) Trainer--does formal training of individuals, large and small groups.

3) Facilitator/change agent--prompts changes in groups and individuals.

4) Colleague/coach--collegial co-teaching, and provides feedback when requested.

5) Supervisor of teachers--provides observations and analyses of instruction for targeted improvement.

It is critical that mentor teachers should not have to battle for substitute teachers. Release time should be built into the program (Shulman, 1986).

Research from UTEP, the Utah Teacher Evaluation Project, gives us some additional insight into essential characteristics of successful mentorship programs (Driscoll, Peterson & Kauchak, 1985). This project consisted of four parts; 1) a year-long inservice course for beginning teachers, 2) a course on mentoring for experienced teachers, 3) surveys of 93 participants in on-going mentorship programs to identify successful practices, and, 4) problem-solving sessions with teachers to gain insights into the problems of beginning teachers. Research findings from this study show that grade level/subject match is more important than teaching style match in the mentor-mentor protege dyad. Two other characteristics of mentor teachers were determined to be very important; being a good teacher and having the ability to understand what the first year teacher is going through. Beginning teachers identified four criteria as being of major importance to them in working with a mentor; that the mentor 1) have enough time available, 2) have concern for beginning teachers, 3) have a communicative-supportive personality and 4) have professional competence. Characteristics least mentioned as having importance were teaching style and professionalism.

Aside from the specific problems described above, others

(Auster, 1984; Hagerty, 1986) are concerned with the overall imbalance of the mentoring relationship.

Is it a way to develop independent initiators? Or could it have negative effects such as "cloning" the mentor teacher, preventing the early experimentation necessary to allow the beginning teacher to develop a personal teaching style? Could the mentor teacher exploit the beginning teacher in order to bask in reflected achievement? Does it put too much pressure on the beginning teacher to perform because the mentor teacher believes the mentor's reputation is involved? Does the relationship inhibit or devalue the loose coupling that naturally occurs between congenial peers? Does the experience of being a mentor encourage good teachers to leave the profession for private industry or school administration? It is too soon to know.

The Research and Development Center for the University of Texas has constructed another model for staff development. Known as RITE (Research in Teacher Education), it forms the core of an experimental study of teaching behaviors and staff development practice. The study found that research-based knowledge can be used effectively to improve teaching practice (Edwards & Barnes, 1985). The model was introduced in San Diego, California. RITE staff members meet with school district staff developers in workshops where the staff members introduce research findings from change studies and effective teaching studies (Barnes, 1981). The purpose of the workshop is to help staff developers use the reseach findings to make informed decisions and plans for staff

development activities. The staff developers are asked to consider the teachers with whom they will be working. Using this research-based knowledge about effective teaching techniques and staff development, the staff developers plan and implement specific activities and interactions at their own site. RITE staff members do not meet directly with teachers. The model lists 115 specific teaching behaviors that focus on the learning environment, management of student behavior, class instruction and teaching style. Despite the complexity of this model, it does not put the decision-making power in the hands of the classroom teacher. Because the site staff developer is an administrator, once again, a hierarchy of decision-making for innovation has been created. This could easily be solved by having RITE staff members meet directly with teachers who are assuming a staff development role.

Staff development is moving away from the one-shot large-group activity with the visiting missionary bringing Christianity to the natives.

> Success of one-shot workshops often depends on who gets shot with what, and the success of the visiting guru on the nature and degree of the expertise provided...The success of long-term locally based and directed change efforts depends on the local change facilitators. (Edwards, 1985)

Peer supervision or peer coaching is a concept that developed in the search for ways for teachers to work collaboratively without creating a new level of hierarchical power. Many variations exist, but the basic premise is that teachers supervise one another. A reciprocal arrangement is developed, without links to performance evaluation and salary

increases.

> When teachers begin to problematise the nature of their work as well as the contexts in which they perform it, there is a closer unity between the theory and practice of teaching (Smyth, 1986b, p. 12).

A two-stage program for staff development using a collegial support model has been developed, based on a program from I/D/E/A, the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, an affiliate of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. The first stage consists of introducing the participants to the program and to each other during 3 or 4 day-long meetings, over a two month period. These meetings, with groups of eight to ten people, focus on team and school site activities. District and building goals are reviewed. Self-evaluation and interest studies are done. Personal/Professional and School Improvement plans are developed from these studies. The processes of brainstorming, consensus, "in-basket" planning, and evaluation are introduced. The goals of the Personal/Professional and School Improvement plans are prioritized. At the end of the first meeting, these prioritized goals are used to choose themes for monthly meetings.

These monthly meetings are the Stage Two meetings. They consist of collegial-support activities, sharing processes, "in-basket" problem sharing/solving, content presentation, and Personal/Professional and School Improvement plan updates. Each individual must make the commitment to implement some aspect of the content presented. Program evaluation and future planning are done at a scheduled time, either at mid-point or year's end. Implementation of this

program requires a facilitator from outside the district, release time for participants, clerical support, and a meeting place, preferably away from the school site. (Rodriguez & Johnstone, 1986).

With all this attention being paid to expanding teachers' professional roles, The Teacher Advisor Project of the Marin County Office of Education was implemented in 1980. The focus of this project was to create two new positions for teachers; teacher advisors and peer facilitators. It was quickly determined that to competently fill these positions, teachers would need additional training, so plans were developed to provide this training. The training was based on two beliefs: 1) teachers can and will define their own professional development needs in relation to school, system, and professional goals, and 2) to affect change in the classroom or school, assistance must be given on-site.

Eight advisors and fourteen teachers were involved in the project. Karen Kent, the project director, used experience gained from this project to formulate the suggestions for role definition of mentor teachers already described above. Research from the project provided useful information about the nature of advisory relationships (Little, 1984). Advisors found it hard to win acceptance, and mutual respect from teachers, and to develop a close working relationship with them. Once in class, advisors had to earn the right to come again. The first move was best made by the advisor. Most advisors' work occurred outside the classroom. Conferences were rare, but those that were

held were generally positive and seemed to work well.

Commmon Problems and Common Needs

Some common problems have appeared in these attempts to place teachers in the decision-making hierarchy. Fear of empowerment has been the most difficult to overcome. This fear has two key aspects. The first is that of administrative attitudes. Teachers have been skeptical about the sincerity of the administrators. This scepticism seems justified, because it has often been difficult to tell whether the administration is serious about empowerment, or merely giving the idea lip service (Kent, 1986).

> ...frequently the attitudes and values espoused by superordinates are very different from the behaviors, structures and processes they actually use in the decision-making or problem-solving enterprise. Many tend to embrace and wholeheartedly endorse the idea of participation; however, they experience a great deal of difficulty behaving in ways which encourage their subordinates to participate actively in the decision-making process. (Wood, 1984, pp.57-58)

Patterson (1986) uses the phrase "accountability without clout". When teachers are brought into the decision-making process,it is critical they be given the authority to implement the decisions they have participated in making. Otherwise, it becomes an empty exercise in the ongoing war against senseless bureaucracy.

The other major aspect in the fear of empowerment is the attitude of the teachers themselves. If teachers are brought into decision-making, they must also be willing to accept responsibility for concerns outside their immediate classrooms (Kent, 1985; Rodriguez, 1986; Project of the California Roundtable on Educational Opportunity , 1985). Teachers have

to be willing to give up the isolation in which they have been working (Showers, 1985), and strive for long-term collegial working relationships, however uncomfortable they may be at first. Teachers must realize conflict is inevitable and is a potential source of information rather than a threat or challenge (Wood, 1984). Teachers need to give up some of their existing cultural beliefs like the ones Little (1984) describes:

> ...advice is not highly prized. The reluctance to assert oneself on matters of curriculum and instruction is seen as proper restraint in the exercise of professional good manners.

Jealousy toward the teachers who have been selected to take part has plagued project implementation. Teachers who have been chosen to assume leadership positions have to learn to come to terms with the obligations of increased influence, while teachers who have not been chosen have to struggle with their own relative decline in status (Bird & Little, 1985). In Marin County, teacher advisors and peer facilitators in the Teacher Advisor Project sometimes met jealousy from teachers who were not moving into new roles (Kent, 1985). Mentor teachers in one large district in California reported awareness of small groups of hostile teachers who had negative reactions to the mentor program (Shulman, 1986), and were occasionally targets of "friendly" jokes about their role. Some of this bitterness may be dispelled when more districts adopt a norm of continuing staff development for all teachers.

Alongside these common problems, common needs have emerged that must be met for empowerment to occur.

These needs are:

. appropriate occasions and places for professional work--the more occasions and places, the more support--(Edwards, 1985; Little, 1982; Showers, 1985).

. training and followup by credible persons (Edwards, 1985; Little 1982; Sparks, 1985; Kent, 1985, Alleman, Cochran, Doverspike & Newman, 1984, Guskey, 1985).

. commitment of teachers (Edwards, 1985; Kent, 1984; McLaughlin, 1978)

. technical assistance to teachers, access to resources (Showers, 1985; Joyce, 1982).

. ongoing feedback (Showers, 1985; Little, 1984).

. hard money (Mann, 1976; Little, Long & Guilkey-Amado, 1986).

Proposals for Change

A major obstacle in empowering teaching as a profession is that it lacks a single well-developed organization to represent it (Toombs, 1985). To remedy this, the California Roundtable on Educational Opportunity (1985) recommends establishment of a state-level policy-making body called a Professional Standards Board. Its responsibilities would span all aspects of the profession and all phases of teaching as a career. This board would: 1) assume authority for teacher certification, and staff development; 2) develop and monitor standards of professional performance and ethics; 3) act as final arbiter in evaluation disputes; 4) assess proposed legislation that affects the teaching profession; and make recommendations about it and 5) initiate, oversee, and promote research and pilot projects related to the teaching profession. A majority of the board members must be practicing K-12 teachers. The board members may be nominated

by districts, schools, school boards, professional associations, community groups, institutions of higher education and others. Members should be appointed by a group consisting of the Governor, the State Superintendent of Instruction, the President Pro Tem of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly, and the most recent chair of the Professional Board. Terms would be appropriately staggered. The Board would have a permanent staff and funding adequate to support its tasks. Revenue would be derived from licensing and examination fees and the State's General Fund. While there might be some quarrel with the specifics of this proposal, certainly it is clear that its implementation would be a major step in raising teaching to the professional status doctors, attorneys and accountants now enjoy. To earn professional status, teachers must be in control of standards of excellence in their profession and be held accountable for them. Teachers must not allow bad teaching to occur and must remove from the profession those teachers whose performance is consistently poor.

In addition to looking at the profession, many theorists are asking that a new look be taken at the nature of organizations (Puxty, Soo, Lowe & Laughlin, 1980; Smyth, 1986a, 1986b; Herda, 1979; Greenfield, 1972). Greenfield says:

> Most theories of organization grossly simplify the nature of the reality with which they deal. The drive to see the organization as a single kind of entity with a life of its own apart from the perceptions and beliefs of those involved in it blinds us to its complexity and the variety of organizations people create around themselves. It leads us to believe that we must change some abstract thing called "organization" rather than

> socially maintained beliefs about how people should relate to one another and how they may attain desired goals. The more closely we look at organizations, the more likely we are to find expressions of diverse human meanings. The focus of investigation should not be, "What should be done to improve this organization?" but, "Whose meanings define what is right to do among people here involved with one another?" (p.571)

Smyth agrees:

> Because of our inability to transcend and question the efficacy of our taken-for-granted practices and the ideology and axiology that sustain them, we resort to examining issues in tired old ways (1986b).
>
> ...I argue that supervision like other fields of professionnal endeavour is suffering from a legacy of being affiliated with an outmoded interpretation of science. Value-free objectivist views of science and the notions of technical rationality that accompany them, have broken down in the face of protracted social problems--social engineering in the guise of neutral science no longer suffices (1986a).

What is implicit in these exhortations to rethink the nature of people working together is the need to use new methods and strategies to study the relationship of the organization and the people working within it. Promoting collaboration and participation in research methodology increases the applicability of the findings and encourages implicitly empowering outcomes (Kieffer, 1981). Including research subjects as active partners throughout the research process characterizes the strategy called dialogic retrospection. All of the participants share responsibility for the research; its preliminary design, the interactive generation of data, and the dialogic interpretation of the data as it is generated. When this strategy is applied to school sites, the research question can be developed out of group-perceived needs, thereby attaining immediate relevancy.

Participating in collaborative research using the

dialogic retrospective method empowers the research subjects. It allows them to identify their areas of concern and provides them with a process for making knowledge-based decisions generated from the information developed within the research paradigm.

The dialogic model reduces the power imbalance that is inherent in the traditional scientific experimental model, where subjects are studied by an "unbiased" observer. The dialogic model transfers control of information to the research subjects. It provides a process for joint elaboration of meaning, and, therefore, allows the participants ownership of the results.

SUMMARY

Despite a wealth of research literature showing the importance of teacher empowerment, and a multitude of plans for bringing teachers to the decision-making table, teachers remain encapsulated in their classrooms. Career ladders, career lattices, merit pay and mentorships not withstanding, teachers have been unable to take their place as first-class citizens in the American education system. Some of the plans that have been implemented show promise, but it is too soon to know how successful they will be.

Theorists are asking that the study of people in organizations be done using new research methods and strategies designed to empower the research subjects. They contend that to continue to use traditional organizational theories will be no more effective than trying to stop a hemorrhage with a band-aid.

IMPLICATIONS

Research clearly shows the importance of teacher involvement in the decision-making process if change is going to occur. Exploring new ways to look at the nature of organizations and the people within them should be continued. Programs can be devised that will provide teachers with the means to identify, define and resolve their own issues.

Existing programs such as the career ladder projects in Tennessee and North Carolina, and the mentor teacher program in California should be monitored and an analysis made of the research data emanating from them. Participatory research projects should be initiated at the school level to promote teacher efficacy. Much remains to be done before teachers can say, "WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES."

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